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ABSTRACT

Cross-school observation, which is part of a joint project involving a college education department and two large suburban high schools, is described. The Collaborative Project for School Improvement (CPSI) involves a joint steering committee and joint inservice sessions, as well as shared resources and a student teaching center. Program planning and implementation and outcomes of cross-school observation are considered. Visits by small groups of teachers to the cooperating school were helpful in launching the project. An important factor in the implementation phase was having someone coordinate the arrangements, such as scheduling observations and arranging for substitute teachers. Participating teachers' reactions to the project, which were elicited through interviews, are summarized. Also discussed are other CPSI components: the steering committee, school development seminars, and joint department meetings. New roles for teachers that have arisen out of the program are also considered, including working on the steering committee and serving as on-site student teacher supervisors. The next steps for continued improvement of a program of professional self-renewal are also addressed. The participating schools, all in California, are: Saint Mary's College in Moraga; California High School in San Ramon Valley; and Foothill High School in Alameda County. (SW)

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Cross-School Observation and Other Dimensions of a School-College Partnership: Some Preliminary Findings

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Cross-School Observation and Other Dimensions
of a School-College Partnership:
Some Preliminary Findings

The Collaborative Project for School Improvement (CPSI) is a joint venture involving the education department of an IHE and two large suburban high schools* in a cooperative effort to improve the quality of education in these schools. The project was conceived and developed (summer and fall, 1984) by a planning committee of faculty and administrators from the three institutions; it has been implemented over an 18-month period (January 1985 - June 1986) with the assistance of a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. CPSI includes the following features:

1. A joint Steering Committee (3 teachers and an administrator from each school and a professor from the IHE) to manage the project (planning, implementation, budgeting, evaluation);
2. School-Development Seminars: joint inservice sessions for faculty of the two schools, designed by the Steering Committee and involving staff from the three participating institutions;
3. Cross-School Observation: a program in which interested faculty from each high school observe classes of colleagues in the other school;
4. A Talent Bank of ideas, materials, resources, developed from cross-school activities and available for individual teacher's use; and

5. A Student Teaching Center with improved processes for integrating teacher candidates into the school and with high school faculty assuming new responsibilities for their training.

Conceptual Bases of the Project

Conceptually, the project draws from recent research related to staff development. In a synthesis of this research, Gary Griffin (1983) delineates eight characteristics of an effective staff development program:

1. It will be designed as a consequence of systematic problem identification by those most directly related to the problem.
2. It will be interactive.
3. It will mitigate to some degree status differences between teachers and administrators.
4. It will depend less on consultants and more on teachers and administrators for substantive and procedural guidance.
5. It will be formulated and monitored largely according to perceptions of the participants.
6. It will be formulated, in part, in terms of a careful analysis of the organization and the people for whom it is intended.
7. It will be flexible and responsive to the changes in participants and the changes in the setting.
8. It will be, within reasonable limits, situation-specific (p. 424).

In its basic organization, with control in the hands of the participants

(i.e., teachers), and in virtually all aspects of its implementation, the Collaborative Project for School Improvement conforms to these characteristics. It should be noted, for instance, that project activities are interactive, situation-specific, based on perceptions of the participants, and responsive to changes in situation.

The following paper will focus largely on one important component of CPSI: cross-school observation. The paper will delineate the original plan for this program, show how it was modified and why, discuss present and anticipated outcome of the program, and speculate on where the program might lead in terms of the continuing professional development of the teacher/participants and the inservice directions of the two schools. To a lesser extent, the paper will touch upon other aspects of the Project. The role of the college facilitator (i.e., the IHE representative) will be addressed in a separate paper.

Cross-School Observation

From the early planning stages, cross-school observation has always been viewed by the Steering Committee as an essential feature of the project. More then 25% of the CPSI budget has been devoted to this activity (paying for substitute teachers). Originally, the observations were conceived as part of a larger process involving: 1) training of selected teachers from the two schools by an IHE instructor on what to observe and how; 2) planned observation of specific classroom skills and "effective dialogue between the two teachers involved in each observation" ("Collaborative Project for School Improvement," p. 5); 3) development of a "model for classroom observation and improved instruction" (p. 5) (i.e., a model that would help teachers observe

effectively and support them in applying promising practices in their own classrooms); 4) development of the Talent Bank alluded to above.

Like many other components of CPSI, cross-school observation as initially planned, was found to be far more ambitious than could be carried out within available time and institutional constraints. The original plans were thus modified, in a manner not inconsistent with Griffin's 7th point, above (i.e., "flexible and responsive to the changes in participants...[and] setting.")

Preparation for Observing.

The training session, which was to occur "in early 1985," did not actually take place until April. It involved some 15 interested teachers from the two schools, who seemed to enjoy the opportunity to discuss common instructional interests and concerns. Much of the workshop, however, dealt with logistics of carrying out the observations (e.g., how to make contact with teachers you want to observe, how to get around the campus you are visiting, how to fill out the required observation form, etc.), rather than training per se. As it turned out, logistics were an important, though previously ignored, aspect of the program. Because of the inherent complexities of individual teachers' arranging their own observation visits, it took several weeks after the workshop for initial plans to be made. Even then, the observations could not be carried out before the end of the semester because there was a serious shortage of substitute teachers, and the principal at one of the high schools cancelled all uses of substitutes except for illness or emergencies. This administrator, it should be noted, was very supportive of CPSI in general and of cross-school observations in particular. He felt that he

had no choice in this instance, however; and so cross-school observations were postponed until the following semester (fall 1985). This was just one of a number of cases where CPSI plans had to be modified because of other school priorities. Once again, the importance of a program like CPSI remaining very "flexible and responsive" is clear.

Early in the fall (1985), the Steering Committee abandoned plans to limit observations to those teachers who had attended the training workshop in spring. The Committee felt that the program needed to get underway immediately with whatever teachers were interested in participating. One of the effects of this decision was to remove controls on what was to be observed and how; this opened the way to an informal, unstructured approach to observing. It also, increased the likelihood that there would be a sufficient supply of interested observers within the two faculties.

Implementing the Process.

Even with this change, however, only a few teachers took immediate advantage of the opportunity for cross-school observation. It soon became clear that logistics were a major stumbling block to the program: teacher simply did not have the time - the stamina, perhaps - to identify potential teachers to observe, to contact them on an individual basis to arrange schedule, to get a substitute teacher and provide lesson plans for him/her. Realizing these difficulties, a teacher from one of the high schools - he was, in fact, the teacher/coordinator of the Steering Committee - began making arrangements for small groups of teachers from his school to visit the other school. This greatly facilitated the process, and teachers began taking advantage of the cross-school observation opportunities. A few weeks later,

a new member of the Steering Committee from the other high school began making similar arrangements for groups of his colleagues to carry out observations. This teacher not only recruited teachers by means of announcements and personal contacts, but he obtained maps and teaching assignments from the first high school, scheduled the observations, and arranged for substitute teachers. In follow-up interviews with observers from this school, almost all of them indicated that carrying out the observations was easy because the aforementioned teacher had recruited them and made all arrangements. The experiences at both schools suggest that there must be an "arranger" - probably a classroom teacher - if cross-school observations are to be successfully implemented.

Another facet of the logistics problem that has continued to bedevil cross-school observations right up to the present has been the difficulty of insuring that the observer would see something that was useful for her or him - i.e., not observing students doing individual seat work, watching a film, etc. Despite attempts to make sure that teachers knew in advance when observers were coming so they could plan at least some observer - worthy activities, it happened regularly that observers felt that they were wasting their time.

One factor contributing to the success of cross-school observation has been the administrative support that CPSI has enjoyed from its inception, particularly in School A, which has seen the principal and two assistant principals play an active role in the operation of the project. In terms of cross-school observation, this has meant accepting a plethora of substitute teachers, endorsing the program clearly and encouraging faculty to participate in it; one administrator has even encouraged teachers to include cross-

school observation as part of their professional development plan.

Between the opening of school in September 1985 and April 10, 1986, 15 teachers from High School A observed some 34 classes in High School B. Characteristically, the observers saw three or four classes; in some cases they had additional time to talk informally with teachers they were observing. The original plan had called for half-day observations, but differences in schedule between the two schools and the difficulties teachers felt in teaching classes, preparing a substitute teacher, and observing in the same day resulted in the pattern quickly changing to whole-day observations. Teachers from High School B did not get underway with observations until December (the role of one teacher/arranger in getting the program going is mentioned above), but since that time some 17 teachers have made observations at High School A, visiting more than 47 classrooms; several of them are even planning to go a second time. Like their High School A counterparts, High School B teachers average two to three classes observed, and characteristically spend additional time talking to teachers at the school.

By the time the cross-school observations end in May, it is projected that more than 40 teachers from the two high schools will have taken advantage of this opportunity for professional renewal.

Outcomes of the Cross-School Observation Program.

What are the outcomes - the specific professional development benefits - that have occurred as a result of cross-school observations? As is the case with many staff development programs, the benefits of cross-school observing are to some extent intangible and difficult to measure precisely. Moreover, in attempting to evaluate outcomes of the program it is important to keep several things in mind: 1) the program is still 'in process': its final

e ects cannot thus be determined with any degree of certitude; 2) the program is and has always been seen as preliminary, i.e., as a basis for later, more focused and articulated staff development activities (e.g., peer coaching, collaborative planning, etc.) and not an end in itself. Strictly speaking, 'Outcomes' should be assessed in terms of what follows the observations; since nothing has yet 'followed,' there is little of this nature to report on. Despite these limitations, it is possible to provide a rough sketch of the present and anticipated results of the cross-school observation program and to speculate on where the program might lead if encouraged to develop coherently.

The two authors of this paper conducted a brief follow-up interview of most of the teachers who had made cross-school observations. The interview consisted of a series of survey questions about the observations: e.g., "Why were you interested in doing cross-school observing?" "What teaching methods (instructional strategies and techniques) were most useful to you?" "Do you anticipate incorporating any of these ideas, materials, methods into your teaching in the future?" Interviewees had an opportunity to expand on their responses, which were written down or tape recorded.

It should be noted that the most significant 'outcomes' of the cross-school observation program were affective in nature, i.e., they related more to teachers' feelings and attitudes toward their work then to new insights in curriculum and instruction. The survey yielded the following information:

1. All of the teachers surveyed indicated that they were interested in cross-school observing because they wanted to learn about new teaching techniques.

2. Several teachers noted that they had become observers of other teachers for the first time since their student teaching experience. This was a refreshing role reversal for many who had become used to being observed on a regular basis by administrators. As one teacher expressed it: "I haven't been in another teacher's classroom for 20 years. No one does it. There's no opportunity. But that's how I learned to teach, so I figured I could improve by doing it again."
3. One of the most persistent responses (70% of the teachers) was that cross-school observations had somehow validated the observer's own teaching approaches. In some instances this involved the realization that other teachers were wresting with the same pedagogical problems in a similar fashion; in other cases it involved the recognition that conditions (resources, students, organizational features) at his/her own school were as good as or better than conditions at the observed school. One teacher remarked: "As I sat in other teachers' classrooms, I realized that I AM able to communicate with my students, that I DO make contact more than I realized. This experience reaffirmed my own teaching." It would appear that such reality testing has significant benefits - in terms of morale if nothing else - for the teacher/observer.
4. All of the teacher/observers interviewed felt that

the cross-school observation program was beneficial and should continue. They indicated that, in addition to validating their own teaching, the observations encouraged growth by allowing them to share their own ideas as well as receive new ones. One teacher commented enthusiastically: "I'm never too old to learn. I wanted to see teaching techniques at another school. I'm interested in learning, perhaps changing."

5. In responding to questions about which curriculum ideas, materials on teaching techniques were most valuable to them, over 90% of the observers identified specific methods (not large-scale approaches but particular activities and techniques). Almost all of the teachers who identified such methods planned to use them in their own classroom in the future, although only a handful of teachers had actually implemented such techniques at the time they were interviewed.

In addition to the data gathered in the survey, the two investigators made some informal findings based on comments of teacher/participants: 1) Most participants in the program who observed other teachers were also observed in their classrooms. Being observed without the threat of an evaluation was a new opportunity for many teachers. Because this threat of evaluation was removed from the process, teachers were more willing to engage in an honest discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of their lessons; 2) In a follow-up questionnaire, observers were asked to identify promising teaching techniques and materials for the Talent Bank. Teachers so

identified as experts by colleagues who had observed them seemed genuinely flattered by this recognition and were thus more inclined to share their techniques and resources with others.

In summary, the cross-school observation program seems to be successful in that teachers find the process interesting and professionally satisfying; it improves their morale by validating and supporting their own teaching; and it provides them with some ideas that they can apply in their own classroom. But where will the program lead (or where has it already led) for participating teachers? To understand this it is necessary to examine other components of the CPSI project, which should be considered in conjunction with cross-school observation in projecting future developments.

Other CPSI Components

Steering Committee.

The School Development Steering Committee, consisting of three teachers and an administrator from each school and an IHE representative, was established by terms of the original plan to have "overall responsibility for implementing project activities and for providing ongoing assessment and direction for the project . . . [and to] serve as the nerve center for a continuing program of school renewal" ("Collaborative Project for School Improvement," p. 7). Though regular procedures had been established for selecting Committee members, in fact the original Planning Committee simply became the Steering Committee; and when vacancies have occurred among teacher representatives, the principals have selected replacements from among those expressing an interest in the project. While this procedure violates, to some extent, the maxim that staff development should be controlled by teachers, it has produced no reactions among teachers and seems of little consequence to them.

The Steering Committee meets once a month for two hours. Teacher representatives receive 1/2 day release time to participate at these meetings. The Committee has joint chairs--a teacher from one school and an administrator from the other--but operates in an informal, free-flowing fashion (e.g., it is always an open question who is going to take minutes). It should be emphasized that it is this committee--not the administration or IHE representative or individual teacher--which makes the basic decisions governing the project. In specific terms, the Committee has: 1) planned the School Development Seminars; 2) planned, implemented and monitored cross-school observations; 3) endorsed and supported the Talent Bank; and 4) monitored the budget, approving expenditures and making necessary revisions. From the outset, the Steering Committee has viewed cross-school observation as central to what CPSI is trying to accomplish; the Committee has devoted more time and energy to this program than to any other aspect of the project.

School Development Seminars.

Originally planned to take place monthly at alternating school sites, the seminars have actually occurred only four times during the first 12 months of the project (tight schedules and the difficulties of planning and publicizing these activities have prevented the Steering Committee from offering more sessions). Faculty members from the IHE have served as facilitators or presenters at three of the sessions. The principal function that the seminars have served is to bring together faculty from the two schools in an environment where they can exchange ideas, share mutual concerns, and consider problem-solving approaches. In this way the seminars have supported the collaboration concept--a concept further enriched and extended through cross-school observations.

Joint Department Meetings.

Recognizing the potential benefits to be realized from bringing together the faculties of the two schools and providing them with the opportunity to discuss common issues and concerns in a relatively free-flowing fashion, the Steering Committee decided to sponsor joint department meetings, on a designated day, in lieu of a School-Development Seminar. Faculty members from each department (English, science, mathematics, etc.) at School A were released early to meet with their counterparts at School B. Although this venture was not entirely successful--some departments had not adequately prepared for the meeting beforehand (department chairs were supposed to develop a mutual agenda); there were complaints from teachers about inadequate prior publicity; in several cases most of the faculty from the host department missed the meeting--there were some distinctly promising outcomes. One of these concerned the two foreign language departments, whose faculties had made several cross-school observations. In their meeting the two departments were able to discuss, in a meaningful way, similarities and differences in materials and approaches and to plan ways to attack common problems. Their interest in future collaborative efforts--joint workshops, curriculum-planning sessions, possible teacher exchanges--was supported by the Steering Committee, which set aside money in the budget for these purposes. The joint department meetings can be viewed as one piece of a larger collaborative effort which, in its totality, will--at least can--contribute to the continuing professional growth of teachers.

New Roles for Teachers

Before considering where cross-school observation is heading for CPSI schools and teachers, or indeed, what outcomes, in terms of professional development, other school might anticipate from similar forms of collaboration, we would like

to examine briefly the impact the project has had in developing new roles for teachers. Such new roles are extremely important if teachers are to control their own staff development programs (which, experts tell us, must happen if staff development is to be effective). CPSI has provided the following new (or semi-new) roles for teachers:

1. Teachers have served as members of the Steering Committee, making decisions about the kinds of staff development activities that were to be offered in their schools.
2. Several teachers, through their own initiative, have served in leadership capacities on the Steering Committee (e.g., chairperson, principal liaison person for a school, etc.). These teachers have assumed new responsibilities vis-a-vis their teacher/colleagues, helping the latter understand the project, assisting them in choosing and carrying out cross-school observations, finding out what needs they have that might be served by CPSI. The teacher/chairperson of the Steering Committee was initially inexperienced in how to conduct meetings, plan agendas, delegate duties and follow up on assignments. Through experience and training (provided by administrators and the IHE), he grew increasingly skilled as a teacher/leader; CPSI clearly provided the context and support for this to happen.
3. Through CPSI, three teachers from High School A were able to serve as on-site student teacher supervisors. These supervisors were trained by the IHE director of student teachers (who was also the IHE representative for CPSI) with the assistance of a school administrator. They observed and critiqued the student teachers'

work and they offered an on-site seminar, which at times involved other teachers as well as the three supervisors. The teacher/supervisors also assumed new roles in their dealings with colleagues who were serving as cooperating (or 'master') teachers: e.g., giving advice on how to support or make suggestions to the student teachers, trying to help the cooperating teacher see a situation from the student teacher's point of view, etc. Having on-site supervision and seminars provided by high school teachers proved to be highly successful for all parties--student teachers, cooperating teachers, the IHE director, and especially the supervisors themselves, who reported that this experience gave them important new insights into their teaching. Two of the teacher/supervisors enthusiastically accepted another opportunity to supervise student teachers.

Next Steps for CPSI

Where does CPSI go from here? i.e., based on what has occurred thusfar, particularly in cross-school observation, what are the next steps in the evolution of an effective program of professional self-renewal? The funding for CPSI runs out in June, although limited monies will probably be carried over to the next school year. Future activities already planned include: 1) continued cross-school observation (through May 1986, with perhaps a bit of funding left over for the next school year); 2) identification, through surveys and informal contacts, of promising instructional practices and curriculum materials, and the storing of this information in a Talent Bank (a microcomputer at each school programmed for easy teacher access); 3) an articulated program of collaborative staff development in the foreign language departments, to take the form of

released-time workshops, presentations by pertinent experts, consultant support from the IHE and elsewhere, support for conference attendance, and opportunity to review new foreign language materials, methods, equipment, etc.; 4) al all-day retreat for members of the Steering Committee to review CPSI accomplishments over the previous 18 months and to plan for the future--a future without external funding; and 5) the preparation of a final evaluation report of the project.

A fundamental question is, what direction can the CPSI schools and teachers now move in a result of the experiences they have had with this project? We believe that several outcomes are possible, perhaps even likely:

1) Further, more exacting cross-school observations can now occur, with observers looking for specific techniques and materials and able to discuss with the teachers they observe the rationale--the advantages and disadvantages--of using these approaches. This sort of openness, which can lead to instructional improvement for participating teachers, would seem to evolve naturally from the kind of informal observations that have occurred under CPSI. Along the same lines, the observations can be truly reciprocal: i.e., teachers from the two schools can plan in a deliberate way to observe each others' classes and to discuss what they have seen and learned.

2) Teachers, having discovered that there are benefits to be garnered through observing colleagues in another school, will be freer about observing fellow faculty members in the same school and department. A number of teachers have expressed an interest in intra-school observation. It is as if they got their appetites whetted

in going to another school, where there was perhaps less threat in observing or being observed; now they are ready to consider observing and discussing the teaching methods of their colleagues down the hall. To the extent that this has happened, it represents a subtle but important shift in the attitude of teachers, recognizing the mutuality of their pedagogical concerns and the potencey of collaborative, supportive efforts to improve teaching.

3) In conjunction with 1 and 2 above, the Talent Bank will be available to help teachers find out about promising methods, materials, resources and to arrange observations of teachers who have something exciting or interesting to demonstrate.

4) Several teachers from the CPSI schools have expressed an interest in exchanging positions for a day or a week. This seems to be logical extension of cross-school observation--an opportunity for a teacher to understand more fully the nature of teaching different students in a different setting and thus to develop a firmer basis for critically examining his/her own teaching style and situation. Teacher exchange seems a likely eventuality for the CPSI schools next year: the program costs almost no money (substitute teachers are not needed) and there is administrative support for such a program.

5) From informal observation, through more deliberate observing and discussion of teaching methods, the progression leads ultimately to some form of peer coaching, where pairs or small groups of teachers agree to work together systematically in planning,

observing, and critiquing each other's teaching in order to improve the overall quality of classroom instruction. A program like this would clearly require considerable commitment and training--probably another grant--it it were to be implemented to any great extent. It is important to note that CPSI, with its cross-school observation program, has prepared some teachers at the two schools to move in this direction.

Viability of the Model

Does the cross-school observation model offer any promise for other schools as a viable approach to professional self-renewal? The answer seems to be a clear Yes. The CPSI experience suggests that teachers are hungry to find out how their colleagues at other schools operate--how they instruct, what materials and methods they use, how they deal with similar problems (e.g., discipline, homework, motivation, placement of students, etc.). They are hungry, too, to converse with such colleagues--to exchange ideas, feelings, complaints, and to go away somehow refreshed, with a feeling, perhaps, that "we are all in this together," or that "things aren't so bad in my school after all." For these reasons alone--reasons of an affective nature--cross-school observation (and cross-school collaborative projects in general) are promising.

Beyond the affective dimensions, however, the program helps build the kind of collaborative base--one of mutual understanding and support--upon which subsequent, more structured and, frankly, more growth-producing (albeit more threatening) programs can be built. As noted above, collaboration between schools can also enhance collaboration within schools. At first, teachers can more easily observe and be observed outside their own school; later, as

they become adjusted to the process and find fellow faculty members interested in working together to improve instruction within the school, they feel in a much stronger position to commit themselves to such a collaborative undertaking. Ironically, going outside their school ultimately helps them work better within their school.

Conclusion

In the context of describing and evaluating CPSI, we have attempted to identify features of this project, particularly in the area of cross-school observation, which offer promise for new programs in professional renewal for teachers and schools. We hope that findings about our small project will be of some assistance to researchers and staff-development planners who recognize the importance of teachers and schools offering significant, effective opportunities for professional self-renewal.

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Notes

*The IHE is Saint Mary's College (Moraga, CA), a liberal arts college of approximately 2000 students with a small (200 FTE) graduate education school. The high Schools are: California High School (San Ramon, CA; San Ramon Valley Unified School District, Contra Costa County; enrollment approximately 1800) and Foothill High School (Pleasanton, CA; Amador Valley Joint Union School District, Alameda County; enrollment approximately 1400).